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FOR CJCS ADM MULLEN FROM AMBASSADOR

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TAGS: PREL, PGOV, PARM, TU
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER: YOUR VISIT TO TURKEY

REF: ANKARA 0368

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Jeffrey for reason 1.4 (b, d)

1. (C) In the short time since your last visit to Turkey, we have seen a broad shift in Turkey's perception of the U.S. and in its view of how we should approach some of the more complex issues in the region. The visit of President Obama was extraordinary, and had a game-changing effect not only in public opinion of the U.S., but also on issues relating to Turkey's increased commitments to Afghanistan, its readiness to move in the direction of rapprochement with Armenia and

even, to a certain degree, on Turkey's willingness to show flexibility in defense procurement issues. The main concern of the Turks at this point for the relationship is how the U.S. plays the Armenian issue. Your visit will take place one day after April 24, Armenian Remembrance Day, and the Turkish government will likely still be digesting the substance and format of how we choose to mark the date.

U.S. Support to Turkey's Counter-PKK Efforts

2. (C) Turkey appreciated the renewed commitment by the President and Secretary Clinton -- whose own very successful visit set the stage for that of the President -- of continued U.S. support against the PKK. CHOD General Ilker Basbug will nevertheless look for a firmer, more concrete, commitment from you to press the government of Iraq and the KRG to take more effective action to isolate the PKK in northern Iraq. He may also request U.S. kinetic support for Turkey's operations against PKK positions in Northern Iraq. (We see no need for this.) His view, as expressed most recently to National Security Advisor Jones during the President's visit, is that 2009 is the year to "break" the PKK. Basbug believes that, combined with more effective measures to isolate the PKK, U.S. assistance to destroy the PKK would make this goal achievable. Basbug's position is likely influenced by his lack of confidence in efforts to develop bilateral relations with Iraq as well as his uncertainty with respect to the situation in Iraq after the U.S. drawdown. Basbug has publicly acknowledged that to eliminate the PKK as a threat to Turkey's security, a broad approach which relies not just on military action is needed. There remains, however, great disparity of views in Turkish society over what is needed to bring the PKK terrorist threat to an end and to "solve" Turkey's long-standing Kurdish issue. Basbug will look for an update on plans to respond to Turkey's request to acquire U.S. - produced UAV systems.

3. (S/NF) Our intelligence support to Turkish counter-PKK operations continues, and Turkey's ability to fuse this intelligence and operationalize it continues to improve dramatically. On 18 - 20 March, our Office of Defense Cooperation, supported by experts from EUCOM, carried out an Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Seminar to further hone these skills. The conference was well attended and achieved its goals. We continue to encourage the Turkish General Staff to accept our offer of a "Warfighter Conference" which should further improve Turkey's capabilities through improved C2 processes and target-area tactics. The Office of Defense Cooperation has initiated

programs designed to give the TGS a systems capability to improve their timeliness and accuracy against the PKK, including accelerating the delivery of JDAM bomb kits and fuzes and working to get them an early advanced-targeting pod capability.

Afghanistan: Turkey Steps Up To The Plate

4. (C) Turkey will more than double its troop presence in Afghanistan, from about 820 to almost 1900, taking command of RC-Capital and adding three OMLTs. Basbug told NSA Jones that the GOT is actively considering sending an additional PRT to Afghanistan. According to MFA contacts, Basbug also told his counterparts at the April 1 Afghan-Pakistan-Turkey trilateral summit that Turkey was giving "positive consideration" to sending an additional PRT to Afghanistan. Your meeting with Basbug will be an important opportunity to press Basbug for a firm commitment to a new PRT, and to encourage Turkey to follow through on its intention to send gendarmerie trainers to Afghanistan. You may also wish to inquire about the possibility of Turkey donating idle Mi-17 utility helicopters in its inventory to Afghanistan. (A recent media report indicates that Turkey may be considering such an offer.)

Afghanistan - Pakistan

5. (S/NF) As you suggested, our ODC, working with the Turkish J2, briefed a delegation of senior Pakistani officers in November 2008 on the operation of our Combined Intelligence Fusion Center (CIF-C) with a view toward making it possible for Pakistan to learn "best practices" from Turkey's experience. Turkey hosted the third Afghanistan - Pakistan - Turkey trilateral summit in Ankara on April 1, with the participation of each country's defense and intelligence chiefs. The focus of the summit was to enhancing military and intelligence cooperation. Your meeting with Basbug is an opportunity to review Turkey's efforts and confirm our belief that they are in line with our own work in this field.

Iraq

6. (C) Iraq remains a major concern for Turkey and a major focus of its diplomatic efforts. President Gul visited Baghdad on March 23-24, the first Turkish head of state to visit in 33 years. Turkey is a major trading partner for Iraq; if Turkey were to take steps to develop its banking

relationship with Iraq, this trade and commerce could be further strengthened. Turkey is seeking Iraq's approval for a natural gas export pipeline which would link Iraqi gas to European markets. An Iraq-Turkey-U.S. tripartite security working group was formed in November 2008 and meets regularly, including representation from the Kurdistan Regional Government, which indicates a new-found pragmatism and a progressive policy toward northern Iraq's Kurds. Turkey has proposed, and the Iraqis are considering, a bilateral mil-mil MOU with Iraq in order to provide a legal framework for training and other forms of assistance to Iraq's military. Turkey's agreement for the use of its territory as a logistical hub by the U.S. remains extremely valuable to operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. While speculation about the withdrawal of U.S. forces across Turkey appears in the press from time to time, Turkish officials are aware that CENTCOM is not actively considering this option.

Local Elections, Local Politics

7. (C) Turkey's March 29 local election was a setback for PM Erdogan's Justice and Development (AK) Party. While it received some 39 percent of the popular vote, expectations were as high as 47 percent. Still, the AKP polled much higher than its closest competitor. Most analysts agree that AKP paid the price for incumbency during an economic downturn, and that voters were also unhappy about widening corruption allegations and were unwilling to increase AKP's hegemony. Of minor operational significance, the AKP lost the ground it had gained during previous local elections from the ethnic Kurdish party in Turkey's southeast.

8. (C) The debate within Turkey on whether the government should continue to insist on a strict interpretation of secularism or to permit greater public expression of Islam has subsided since your last visit. Tensions between the elected civilian government and Turkey's entrenched secular bureaucracy (including the General Staff) which were so prominent in the run-up to your last visit have largely receded, but the "Ergenekon" case -- a broad-ranging investigation of an alleged plot, supposedly involving extra-judicial and extra-governmental activity to support secularist ideals -- continues. This case, with government-supported prosecutors carrying out arrests of some outspoken secular figures, is an irritant in Turkish civil-military relations. (See ref for background on the "Ergenekon" case.)

Economic Downturn

9. (C) The effects of the global downturn have hit Turkey's economy. After six and a half years of strong economic growth, we now expect that Turkey's GDP will contract by three percent or more in 2009. Thanks to banking reforms introduced as a result of a meltdown in 2001, Turkey's banking sector is more solid than in other export-oriented countries. Negotiations with the IMF -- on hold during the run-up to the March 29 local election -- are resuming and an agreement is expected to be reached in May 2009.

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Jeffrey